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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000520

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: CONAKRY YOUTHS DEMAND PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION,
PLAN DEMONSTRATIONS

Classified By: A/DCM SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. A group of 12 prominent youth leaders have sent a letter to President Conte demanding his immediate resignation and the dissolution of the entire government. They are waiting to see if the president will meet with them tomorrow. If he does not, they plan to hold a press conference and proceed with a 48-hour "ville morte," followed by widespread demonstrations. The youth leaders have a clearly defined strategy for garnering support and achieving their objectives. It is unclear how successful they have been in winning organizations over to their cause, but the population is generally frustrated with the deteriorating political situation, and it may not take much to spark widespread support. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) A/DCM independently met with two of Conakry's most active youth leaders, both in their late twenties, to discuss plans for an organized youth movement. On September 10, A/DCM met with Thierno Balde, a Stanford-educated Peuhl who heads up a local NGO focusing on human rights and justice. The next morning, A/DCM met with Dansa Kourouma, a medical doctor by education who describes himself as an activist of 15 years. The Embassy nominated Kourouma to participate in a 2009 International Visitor's Program. He heads up a local NGO that is working with IFES to prepare youths for the upcoming legislative elections. Thierno tends to look at things from an academic perspective whereas Kourouma is generally more pragmatic. The two leaders often disagree on political strategies and priorities.

CALLING FOR AN END TO THE REGIME

¶3. (C) Thierno informed A/DCM that a core group of 12 youth leaders, including Dansa Kourouma, have been quietly organizing what they believe will be a massive youth movement for political change. The group sent a letter to President Conte last week in which they reportedly demanded the President's immediate resignation, dissolution of the entire government including the National Assembly, and the installation of a transitional government with a six month mandate for organizing both legislative and presidential elections. Thierno said that they will support Archbishop Robert Sara, who is a highly respected Guinean religious leader currently at the Vatican, as the head of the transitional government because they need someone "with integrity."

¶4. (C) Both Thierno and Kourouma independently said that they are insisting on a meeting with the president no later than September 12. If the president refuses, the youth leaders plan to hold a press conference on September 13 to publicize their demands. Thierno told A/DCM that once the movement is made public, they will call for a "ville morte" beginning September 15, which will include a complete shut

down of banks, markets, and the transportation sector. According to Thierno, the group is only willing to stage the ville morte for a maximum of 48 hours before moving on to the next stage. Kourouma said that the second stage would involve a large gathering of youths at the national stadium in Conakry, which would be followed by street demonstrations.

A PEACEFUL MOVEMENT FOR POLITICAL CHANGE

¶15. (C) Although both leaders acknowledged the physical risks of such demonstrations, they said that they are committed to a "peaceful movement." They described a detailed strategy for garnering widespread support from all sectors of Guinean society, as well as the diplomatic community, which they were already in the process of implementing. According to both sources, youth leaders have been hitting the pavement for the last several days to try and drum up support from other youth associations, diplomatic missions, civil society organizations, and political parties.

¶16. (C) On the security side, Thierno met with local police officials on September 10 and asked them to refrain from violence. "We are talking to them at the local level because they are the ones who will be implementing any orders that come from the top," he said. According to Thierno, the police were sympathetic and told him that they "went through the same thing not too long ago." Thierno was planning to meet with Army Chief of Staff General Camara on September 11. When asked whether he had reached out to youths in the military, Thierno said that he had and that many of the young

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soldiers were sympathetic to the cause. However, he added that they lack leadership and are reluctant to join the movement for fear of retaliation.

¶17. (C) Kourouma said that the youth leaders have a detailed strategy for avoiding violence and achieving their objectives should demonstrations become necessary. He said that "when we get started, we will move fast, and we will go all the way until we get what we want." Kourouma said that maintaining access to the Castro Bridge (which controls access to the downtown area and the presidential palace) will be critical. According to Kourouma, the youths will stage different groups of demonstrators throughout the city and advise them to scatter as soon as security forces are sighted, and then regroup elsewhere. "We will have diversion groups too so that we can keep the military from closing the Castro Bridge."

BRINGING COMPETING INTERESTS TOGETHER

¶18. (C) In response to a question about how the youth leaders are unifying the multitude of Conakry-based youth associations, Thierno said that the leaders had purposely created the core group of 12 as a way to include a wide range of interests. Citing ethnic tensions, Thierno told A/DCM that the leaders selected a Soussou, Allesandre Camara, as their spokesperson because that was more acceptable to the Peuhls and the Malinkes. He said that the core group includes representation from all ethnic groups, civil society, political parties, and the business sector.

¶19. (C) Both Thierno and Kourouma acknowledged challenges in bringing groups together because of competing political interests. According to Thierno, a number of youth groups have been bought off by various political leaders including Prime Minister Souare, former Finance Minister Kassory Fofana, Minister Secretary General Keira (of the Presidency), and business tycoon Mamadou Syllah. Kourouma told A/DCM that the PM had paid off several groups last week, and that he had met with several other groups around 23:00 on September 10.

Despite these apparent efforts to create divisions, both leaders were confident that they could maintain unity because everyone is committed to the "absolute necessity of a regime change."

¶10. (C) With respect to the youth associations in the interior, Thierno said that the Conakry-based leaders are in touch with them via texts by cell phone, but that they do not have any direct influence over these groups. He said that his group is focusing on the movement in Conakry, but that other youth associations across the country would likely join them once things start moving.

PREPARING FOR THE WORST

¶11. (C) Both leaders appeared passionately committed to the movement. Independently, the both said "we are ready to be arrested, to be tortured, even to be killed." Kourouma added that this movement is "Guinea's last chance." Thierno told A/DCM that a peaceful grassroots movement is the only peaceful solution at this time, citing fears of what might emerge when the president dies. "We could end up with another military coup, Ousmane Conte (the president's son and notorious narcotics kingpin) in charge, or an ethnic civil war. We have to act now to try to transition peacefully," he said.

COMMENTS FROM OTHER CONTACTS

¶12. (C) The Guinean Army sent an envoy to speak with the DATT on September 11 regarding the situation. The envoy said that the military is aware of the situation, but does not plan to interfere. He said that he did not think the movement would come to fruition.

¶13. (C) A contact from a prominent local human rights NGO told POL LES that he had been approached by Thierno, and that his NGO plans to support the movement, especially if it turns out to be a national effort. "Within the next few weeks, we will definitely see an uprising," he said. He added that he had just returned from Kankan and that youths there were agitating for some kind of leadership of just such a national movement. However, conversations with other

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contacts suggest that there are still plenty of key players who are not aware of the planned movement, although there was general agreement that something needs to happen to force change.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Unlike during previous discussions with A/DCM, both Thierno and Kourouma had a clearly defined strategy that was articulate and logical. The fact that they were working together when they have so often disagreed in the past lends legitimacy to their claims of broad-based support. It is unclear to what extent the population will back them, and they will likely be challenged to maintain unity in the face of competing interests and political manipulation. However, the general population is frustrated with the political situation and it may not take much to spark widespread civil support, especially if there is some leadership with a clearly articulated strategy.

¶15. (C) The youths' demands are not narrowly defined objectives that satisfy self-interests (as was the case with the unions, the police, and the military). Instead, they are demanding exactly what everyone else has been talking about in private. Thierno and Kourouma appeared passionately

committed to their objective despite the risks. They are hoping for a peaceful solution, but the possibility of a military crack down is high. It is unusual that they are planning this movement during the height of Ramadan, which is considered a holy month. For now, until they go public with their demands in the planned press conference, this youth movement is just bubbling underneath the surface. END

COMMENT.

BROKENSHIRE